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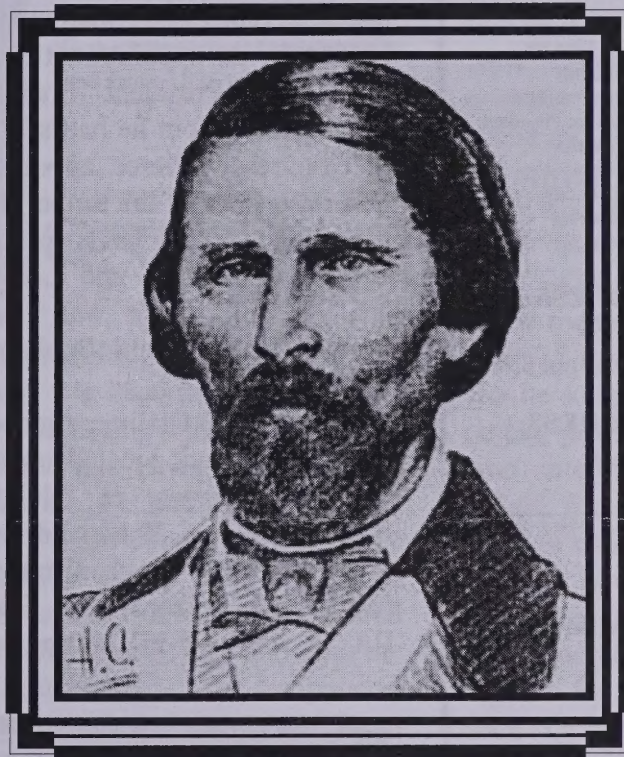
OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

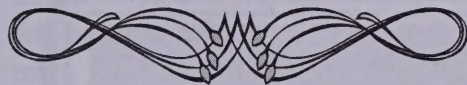
September 2008

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The September luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, September 18, 2008, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The speaker has not been finalized at this time. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call **by noon on Wednesday, September 17**, to assure your reservation and to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-five people. The price of the lunch is \$8.00.



J. F. H. Claiborne  
(1807—1884)



## President's Message

I hope that the visit by Gustav had little, if any, impact on you and yours. Even though the experience was stressful, the Gulf Coast did a good job of preparing for a potentially bad storm.

I know I'm repeating myself, but we are still looking for actors, guides, hosts, and site preparers for our Fifteenth Annual Halloween Cemetery Tour. This event is highly anticipated by the community, and it is a lot of fun for the participants. And you might even learn some his-

(Continued on p. 4)

## Gentleman Planter Or Confederate Yankee?

Compiled and edited by  
Eddie Coleman

The nephew of W. C. C. Claiborne and the son of General Ferdinand Claiborne, John Francis Hamtramck (J. F. H.) Claiborne spent the last few years of the antebellum era and the Civil War and Reconstruction at Laurel Wood, his home on Mulatto Bayou in southwest Hancock County. It was also

here that he wrote the works which brought him recognition as Mississippi's foremost historian of the nineteenth century.

Born in Mississippi and educated in Virginia, Claiborne lived in Natchez for a time and served in the Mississippi Legislature and the U. S. Congress. As a result of his exposing a plan to defraud the U. S. government and Indians in the Choctaw lands case, he was forced to leave Mississippi for New Orleans. Here he became involved in the speculation of land, cotton, and slaves. Later he edited the main Democ-



THE

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor  
Linda-Lou Nelson, PublisherPublished monthly by the  
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Marianne Pluim, Webmaster**LOBRANO HOUSE  
HOURS**MONDAY — FRIDAY  
10:00AM — 3:00PM  
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)**MISSION STATEMENT**

"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

ratic newspapers of Louisiana and Mississippi.

Disappointing business ventures and failing health caused him to turn to what he perceived a more lucrative avocation—gentleman farmer. He purchased Laurel Wood plantation in 1849. However, he needed a more steady income, so he sought an appointment from his friend President Franklin Pierce with whom he had served in Congress. Pierce appointed him supervisor of the timber district comprised of lands in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana in 1852. He was reappointed by President Buchanan in 1857.

In 1853 Claiborne moved to Laurel Wood, located on the Gulf of Mexico at Mulatto Bayou between Waveland and the Rigolets approximately twelve miles from Fort Pike, LA. It was built in 1800 by one

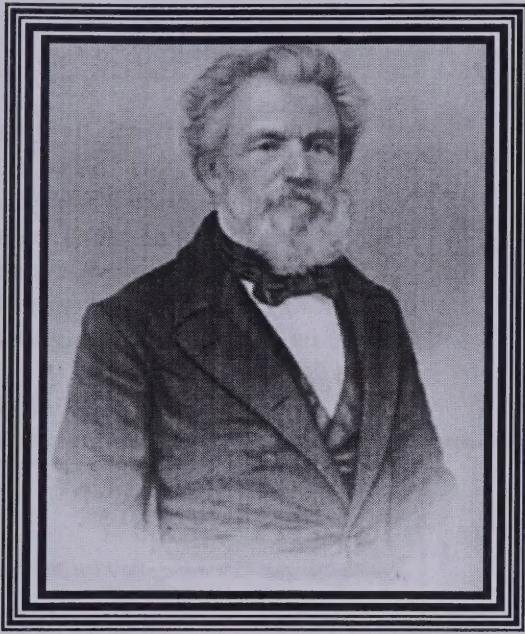
of the Sauciers, probably François, using slave labor. It had a pitched tin roof supported by high brick piers joined by iron bars to hold slaves brought into the territory in the early days of the nineteenth century. There were also slave quarters at the rear of the main house. (The house stood until the 1960's when it was razed to make room for the Port Bienville Industrial Complex.)

At Laurel Wood Claiborne enjoyed a much more leisurely life than he had been able to experience earlier, so he devoted his time and energies to scholarly and cultural pursuits. In fact, many of his early years at Laurel Wood were spent in writing Mississippi history. In 1858 with Benjamin Wailes, Joseph B. Cobb, and Benjamin Sanders, he organized the Mississippi Historical Society. He published *The Life and Times of*



Laurel Wood  
at Mulatto Bayou





This is a picture of J. F. H. Claiborne in his later years. He was the first editor of the *Natchez Statesman and Gazette* and the *Mississippi Free Trader*. In addition, he served in the Mississippi Legislature and from 1835 to 1837 in the U. S. Congress.

General Sam Dale, the *Mississippi Partisan* in 1860. In the same year, he published in two volumes *The Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman*.

Although he had practically no training in agriculture or plantation management, Claiborne was able to make a financial success of Laurel Wood. He experimented with new crops and introduced new varieties of peas, which he acquired from France, England, and Germany. He also raised potatoes, other vegetables, and oranges. His dominant and most successful crop was Sea Island Cotton, and by 1861 with the help of one hundred slaves, he was out of debt and had an annual income of six thousand dollars.

Unfortunately, the Civil War disrupted his halcyon days at the plantation. Claiborne sent his wife and daughter to Natchez for the duration, and his son joined the Confederacy. Claiborne was torn between supporting the Union and supporting his

favorable South and the Confederacy. He tried to remain neutral by secluding himself at Laurel Wood and trying to "weather... the war in isolation."

However, Claiborne's decision about what to do was not an easy one. He considered several reasons for following the Confederacy: he supported states rights; he owned slaves and supported slavery; his son joined and ultimately died fighting for the Confederacy; and he was a neighbor and acquaintance of major political figures of the Confederacy. His arguments for remaining loyal to the Union were fewer, but for him stronger: he took seriously his duties as a U. S. timber agent and his pledge to support the U. S. government; and he placed the Union above the states. Therefore, he sided with the Union and, in effect, became a Union spy.

Evidence that Claiborne was a Union spy may be found in his frequent and regular cor-

respondence with Major General Nathaniel Banks, commander of the Union army occupying New Orleans. From letters Claiborne wrote to Banks, we know he reported that twenty wagonloads of salt were sent to Confederate General Joe Johnston. He also told of fortifications built at Mobile and of smuggling between New Orleans and Mississippi coastal towns. It seems Claiborne did get a financial perk for his spying: he was allowed to grow and sell cotton during the war.

On July 26, 1865, Claiborne took the oath of allegiance to the United States. After the war he sought favor with the carpetbag governor Adelbert Ames, who interceded on Claiborne's behalf for the federal government to compensate him for the losses at Laurel Wood. In return, Claiborne wrote articles defending General Grant and supporting him for a third term as President.

In 1870 at the death of his mother-in-law, Claiborne inherited Dumbarton Plantation and moved permanently to Natchez. Although he retained his Gulf Coast lands, his visits to Laurel Wood became less frequent, and his last prolonged visit occurred in 1876 when he was invited to speak at Bay Saint Louis during the centennial celebrations on July 4.

In his last years Claiborne wrote prolifically. In 1879 he published his first volume of *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State*; unfortunately his manuscript for volume two was lost in an explosion of a Missis-





This later picture of Laurel Wood shows its overgrown grounds and disrepair. It was demolished in the 1960's.

issippi River steamer. [Editor's note: There is another point of view about the loss of the manuscript. Some authorities believe it was lost in a fire which destroyed Claiborne's home in March 1884. Or, it could be that the house fire destroyed an entirely different manuscript.]

Claiborne died at Dumbarton on May 17, 1884, and is interred in Trinity Churchyard in Natchez.

#### SOURCES:

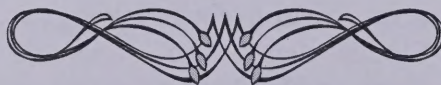
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We are in need of volunteers of all kinds: typists, yard workers, gardeners, etc. Please call 467-4090 to volunteer. *Thank you to those members who have already given of their time and talents.*

Please volunteer to help with the Annual Halloween Tour by calling the Loblano House at 467-4090. We need workers to set up the cemetery, guides, actors, and donations of treats for the guests at the house.

#### President's Message (Continued from p. 1)

tory.

Remember our regular luncheons are by reservation only. Even Maxwell (our Executive Director's canine) must have his name on the list. As seating is limited, consider calling early so you won't miss the always interesting program and the always delicious food.

Scott Bagley

#### BOOKS FOR SALE AT LOBRANO HOUSE

*Bay Saint Louis: Celebrating the First 300 Years*  
By the HCHS (\$15.00)

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 will sign his collection of editorial cartoons.  
 5:00 P. M. — 7:00 P. M.  
 September 27, 2008: See us at Wavefest!  
 September 28, 2008 — October 4, 2008:  
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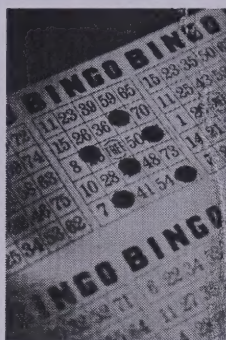
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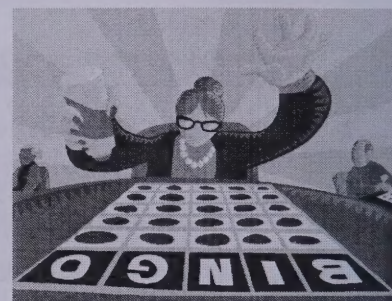




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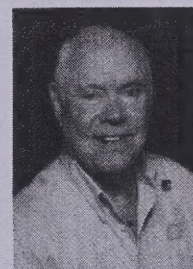
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